

ALEXANDER WILLIAM EVANS (1868-1959)

JOHN R. REEDER AND CHARLOTTE G. REEDER

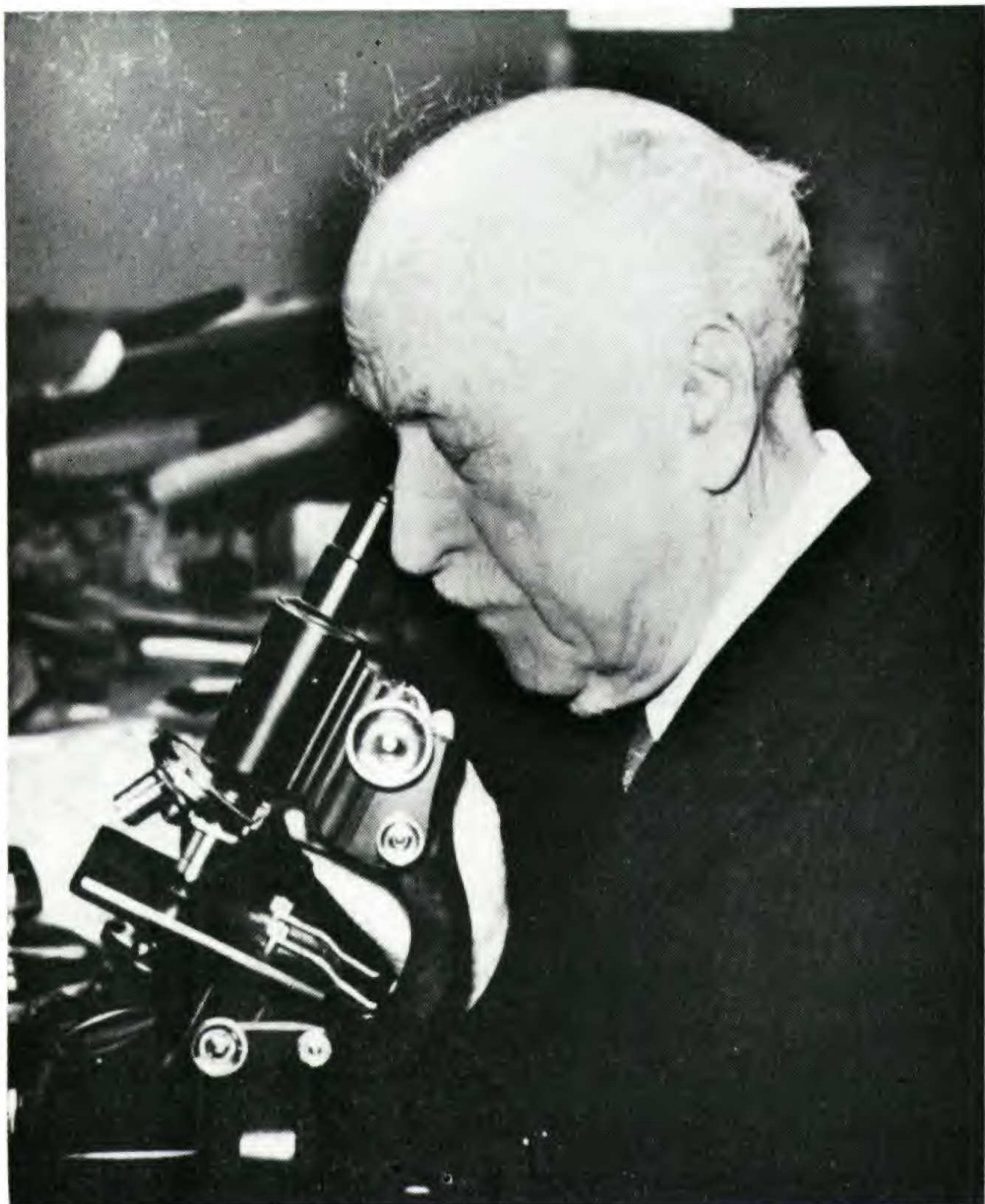
Dr. Alexander W. Evans, one of the world's leading authorities on hepaticology and lichenology, died December 6, 1959 at the age of 91. Death came as the result of pneumonia contracted as he was recovering from an operation for a broken hip suffered on October 18th. Until this accident he had been in good health and customarily spent part of each day working in his room at the Osborn Botanical Laboratory.

The son of a manufacturer and shipping line operator, Alexander William Evans, the youngest of seven children, was born in Buffalo, New York, on May 17, 1868. The Evans family was one of the oldest and most respected in Buffalo, having been engaged in the shipping business there since 1832. Here Evans spent his early boyhood, but in 1880, after his father's death, the family moved to New Haven and this was Dr. Evans' home for the remainder of his life. That Evans inherited his longevity is suggested by the fact that his mother had attained the age of 99 years at the time of her death in 1925.

Upon graduation from Hillhouse High School in New Haven, Evans enrolled in the Sheffield Scientific School of Yale University, receiving a Ph.B. degree in 1890. As an undergraduate he was a distinguished student, and the Class Book for 1890 cites him for "excellence in all studies." Apparently he had an exceptional aptitude for the sciences and languages. At one time or another he stood at the top of his class in German, mathematics, chemistry, and physics, or shared this honor with a fellow student. He was elected secretary-treasurer of his senior class. Although preparing for medical school, Evans was collecting and studying liverworts throughout his college years, and the subject of his senior essay was "Classification of the Hepaticae."

Entering the Yale Medical School in 1890, Evans received his M.D. degree two years later. In his final year there he also served as an assistant in chemistry. It seems that his heart was really in botany, however, for although making a fine record in medical school, he had published three papers on the Hepaticae by the time he had received his medical

degree. As soon as his two-year internship in the New Haven Hospital was completed, he left for Europe in order to study botany under Professor Kny at the University of Berlin. These studies were soon interrupted, for the following



ALEXANDER W. EVANS (1868-1959)

Photograph by I. M. Lamb

spring he received news of the unexpected death of his former professor, Daniel Cady Eaton, along with an invitation to return to Yale and take charge of botanical instruction. Appointed first as instructor (1895-1901), then as assistant professor (1901-1906), Dr. Evans was promoted in 1906 to Daniel Cady Eaton Professor, a position he held until his retirement in 1936. As an emeritus professor he continued his researches with as much vigor as before and these were

not interrupted until the accident which shortly preceded his death.

It is characteristic of Dr. Evans that even though he already held a doctor's degree (M.D. 1892), soon after his appointment as botanist he began preparing a treatise to present as a Ph.D. dissertation. The story is told that, as the only member of the botany department, he rejected his first thesis, and, although publishing it, admonished himself to prepare a more satisfactory one. This advice was apparently followed, for he received the Ph.D. degree in 1899. Although somewhat farcical, this story does illustrate well the high standards which Dr. Evans always set for himself with respect to his research.

Dr. Evans was an indefatigable investigator and he was the author of some 165 research papers¹ during his lifetime, many of which included beautiful illustrations from his own pen. His researches on Hepaticae, interrupted during his internship in the New Haven Hospital, were again resumed with vigor after he joined the Yale faculty. For 60 years (1896-1956) one or more research papers appeared annually except for the periods 1928-29, 1941-42, and 1946. The first of these lapses can be explained when we note that a 147 page treatise on lichens appeared in 1930, along with two shorter articles on the Hepaticae. During the second lapse it seems that Dr. Evans was working intensively to become familiar with the microchemical methods described by Asahina of Japan and to satisfy himself as to their value in lichen taxonomy. In 1943 he published two papers in which he discussed these techniques as applied to the systematics of the Cladoniae. The lapse in 1946 should need no explanation since at that time Evans was already in his 78th year of life.

For many years Dr. Evans confined his studies to the Hepaticae and by 1940 had published more than 130 papers dealing with this group. These works include the descriptions of eight new genera and some 130 new species, as well as innumerable transfers. Rather early, however, an interest in lichens was developing, and he published a short note

¹A full bibliography of Dr. Evans' writings is to be published in *The Bryologist*.

on this group in 1916. Ten years later, his first long paper on lichens appeared, and at about this time he took up the serious study of the genus *Cladonia*. From 1940 onward, his researches were confined to this genus, and in fact he was working on a manuscript the day before he broke his hip. It is remarkable that although nearly 70 when he learned of Asahina's work, Dr. Evans almost immediately began to apply these microchemical methods, and continued to use them for the remainder of his life. He was quite intrigued with the techniques, and delighted in showing anyone interested the beautiful crystals, pointing out their diagnostic value.

For a number of years after joining the Yale faculty, Dr. Evans spent part of each summer in Europe. These trips were only in part botanical. He was deeply interested in art and journeyed to observe these treasures in France, Italy, Austria, Germany, and other areas. He also visited botanical laboratories and accumulated literature he needed for his studies. A certain amount of botanical collecting was also accomplished, as there are in the Yale Herbarium specimens of Bryophytes collected by Evans in a number of European countries. In connection with these trips, he attended the second (Paris, 1900), third (Vienna, 1905), and fourth (Brussels, 1910) International Botanical Congresses. At the Vienna meeting he was appointed a member of the committee concerned with the nomenclature of Hepaticae and was reappointed at successive Congresses until the ninth (Montreal, 1959). In 1953 he was invited to accept the Honorary Presidency of the Section on Lichenology at the VIII International Botanical Congress to be held in Paris the following year. He was greatly pleased by this honor and hoped to attend the Congress, but unfortunately was unable to make the trip.

In connection with his botanical studies, Dr. Evans collected extensively in his home state of Connecticut. This was begun while he was still an undergraduate student, and in the Yale Herbarium are specimens of liverworts collected by him in 1888. He did field work in other parts of New England as well, and there are records of numerous trips which he made to the White Mountains in New Hampshire.

He also visited adjacent Canada, as well as New Jersey and New York. Additional collecting was done by him in some of the southern states, particularly the Carolinas, Alabama, and Florida. Five trips to this latter state were made especially to collect *Cladonia* and most of the counties of the state were visited. The first trip was in 1938, the others annually from 1947 to 1950. The Caribbean Islands also received his attention and two trips were made to Puerto Rico (1900, 1902) and to Jamaica (1903, 1906). Some of the other islands were visited on subsequent trips made some 20 years later. Another excursion took him to Columbia, Venezuela, and Panama.

In 1914 Evans married Phoebe Whiting, the daughter of a prominent New Haven family. Three daughters were born of this marriage. Mrs. Evans and two of the daughters survive him. Many of the trips which Dr. Evans made after 1914 were in the company of some member of his family.

The collecting activities of Dr. Evans were not confined exclusively to plant specimens; he was also an avid stamp collector. This hobby was apparently a source of great pleasure to him, and he devoted considerable time to it, particularly in his later years. At the time of his death he had amassed a substantial collection which was valued at several thousand dollars.

A gentle kindly person and rather retiring, Dr. Evans had a warm personality, a keen sense of humor, and enjoyed the respect and esteem of all who knew him. His former students remember him as an excellent teacher. To have published as extensively as he did, he was of necessity much preoccupied with research. Nevertheless, he was generous with his counsel which was freely given when requested, but it was not in his nature to intrude his views upon others unsolicited. His gift for writing concise English was well-known, and elicited comments from even the late M. L. Fernald, himself no literary pariah². For more than

²In this connection, Fernald in 1949 had inadvertently referred to "the late Alexander W. Evans". Being fast on his feet to make an unexcelled recovery, Fernald, just a few months before his own death, wrote [Rhodora 52: 49-51. 1950] a delightful little article entitled, "Long Life to Alexander W. Evans" in which he not only paid tribute to Evans but forcefully brought out the point that many botanists live to a ripe old age. ED.

a quarter of a century (1907-1934) Evans was a member of the editorial board of the Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club, serving as its editor-in-chief from 1914-1924. He was also an associate editor of *The Bryologist* for a number of years.

That he was not a narrow specialist is shown by the fact that he was a charter member of the Connecticut Botanical Society, as well as its first president. He was also a long-time member of the Torrey Botanical Club and the New England Botanical Club. For many years a member of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, he served as its secretary from 1897-1903. He was Vice President of the Botanical Society of America in 1911, while in 1912 he was elected to membership in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Esteem for Dr. Evans and respect for his researches continued long after his official retirement. He took great pride in the fact that on the occasion of the centennial of its Sheffield Scientific School, in 1947, his alma mater, Yale University, awarded him an honorary Sc.D. degree. Another honor, which touched him as deeply came to him in his 88th year. As part of its 50th anniversary celebration, the Botanical Society of America included him as one of the 50 most outstanding living American botanists. — OSBORN BOTANICAL LABORATORY, YALE UNIVERSITY.